

## **Strategic Direction**

RTM recommends a strategic direction for Fredericksburg Area Tourism (FAT) that includes:

- A. *Advance the FAT organization to become a free standing tourism authority funded jointly by the three jurisdictions. This authority would have a board appointed by the three jurisdictions and be comprised of direct stakeholders (hoteliers, attractions, restaurants, and merchants). Also, public/private cooperative efforts need to be a part of this organization.*
- B. *Institute funding for the new organization based on 100% of the total lodging tax collected by each of the jurisdictions, plus 40% of the food and beverage tax collected. Other proceeds would be generated by public/private cooperative marketing programs.*
- C. *Hire a new executive director that has demonstrated experience in marketing historic and heritage areas, has demonstrated sound business practices, understands sustainable tourism, and is perceived as being impartial among the three jurisdictions.*
- D. *Develop a strong positioning and “brand” for tourism promotion, based on scientific research that captures the most compelling tourism attractors for visiting The City of Fredericksburg and the Counties of Spotsylvania and Stafford. This branding is to be used consistently and widely.*
- E. *Develop a marketing program that targets specific target markets with specific targeted messages, based on the overall positioning/branding.*
- F. *Analyze and document per-visitor expenditures (by market segment) and monitor increases in the same as a results measure.*
- G. *Develop a regional visitor center (conveniently located on I-95 or approaching downtown Fredericksburg) that provides a comprehensive overview and orientation for visiting the area.*
- H. *New tourism authority to serve as comprehensive resource for:*
  - *Researching market needs*
  - *Providing “wish list” of new tourism products*
  - *Partnering with the three jurisdictions for continued tourism infrastructure enhancement*
  - *Partnering with private enterprise and non-profit groups (attractions, lodging, restaurants, etc.) and supply marketing research guidance, coaching, and marketing development concepts.*
  - *Promoting and marketing the FAT region*
- I. *New tourism authority would be required to provide an annual report that documents return on investment for each of the three jurisdictions as well as other result measures.*

### **Summary**

As documented in research, FAT and the three jurisdictions have done an admirable job in promoting tourism and satisfying visitor needs. This is evidenced in the high satisfaction rating (A- grade) visitors report.

The RTM team also acknowledges the sheer quality of the product. The Fredericksburg area is fortunate to be home to some of the most treasured history and heritage America has to offer.

Also, the three jurisdictions are to be commended for working jointly to develop the Fredericksburg Area Tourism cooperative marketing program. This was a beneficial undertaking for all involved and has resulted in significant economic impact for the three jurisdictions and their respective residents.

It appears that it is now time to take the next step in the evolution of tourism marketing for the region. Clearly, there is tourism marketing frustration voiced by the three jurisdictions and the industry partners (museums, attractions, lodging properties, etc.). However, the commitment to tourism is unwavering. The bottom line is that this region understands that tourism is a critical economic impact element and must be nurtured. There is also great sentiment that a sustainable level of tourism is obtained that does not diminish either the quality of the product or the environment and lifestyle of the residents.

The customer, or visitor, has mostly good things to say about the area. They love the natural and architectural beauty, the historic significance, the friendliness of the residents, and the cleanliness of the area.

The primary dislikes reported by visitors included traffic and wayfinding, as well as the normally expected complaints about weather. Additionally, in intercept interviews we documented a number of visitors who wanted more to do in the evenings, especially in downtown Fredericksburg. There were also some complaints about the lack of quality dining in the Spotsylvania and Stafford County areas, and the lack of downtown lodging in Fredericksburg.

The attractions and activities that visitors rated most highly include visiting historic sites, visiting downtown Fredericksburg (shops and restaurants), driving and sightseeing, and visiting museums and attractions. The top rated potential new additions to the existing product mix includes Civil War Reenactments, arts and crafts festivals, a museum focused on George Washington, and a multi-entertainment complex.

During the course of this project RTM interviewed a number of community and tourism industry leaders as well as residents. These interviews indicate that the industry is strong and is ready to move forward with the next level of tourism advancement.

## **Marketing Strategies**

We use the word “advancement” very purposefully here. It is clear that it is not just *more visitors* that the industry wants, but *higher per-visitor expenditures* and greater economic impact from tourism marketing investments. Specifically there is strong sentiment for very strategic tourism marketing efforts with specific outreach efforts targeted to specific markets. This literally becomes a matrix of target markets including day trippers, groups, conventions, families and adults traveling without children, as well as interest-specific markets.

Based on the research and input gathered for this study, RTM recommends that the three jurisdictions now move beyond the co-operative program of tourism marketing into a more structured joint effort. A new tourism authority is recommended, with leadership appointed by each of the three jurisdictions. This leadership is to be comprised of primary stakeholders (lodging, attractions, merchants, and other tourism-related services) and serve as the voice of tourism for each of the three jurisdictions. Funding for the new organization is recommended as being 100% of the tourism lodging tax and 40% of existing food and beverage taxes. The primary purpose of this organization is to provide leadership in guiding and developing tourism for all three areas. It is recommended that specific objectives and return-on-investment measures be required of this organization. It is also recommended that this new authority have public/private interests. Ideally, the authority would develop the research and guidance for tourism in the area. Then the authority would partner with private and non-profit organizations in promoting and developing various programs and promotional projects. This would be a “pay as you play” scenario.

Positioning/branding is also required to provide the compelling enticement to the region and drive visitation. This positioning needs to capture the historic nature of the region, while promising entertainment and fun for visitors.

Additionally, a regional visitor center would provide the critically important orientation and overview that is required to compel overnight stays and return visits. The existing facilities (downtown Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania) are good, but the space is simply too limited in both facilities. Also, visitors must travel into downtown Fredericksburg in order to find that center. The I-95 location is much better – especially if it can be expanded. If expansion is not possible then a new center location needs to be sought. The entire purpose of this center is to drive overnight visitation and day trips that provide significant economic impact for each of the three jurisdictions.

Tourism provides critical economic impact to each of the three jurisdictions today. The research conducted in this study provides a strong foundation for improving that economic impact as well as preserving the rich heritage and historical significance of the Fredericksburg area.

## **Recommended Strategies**

Based upon research conducted for this project, Randall Travel Marketing recommends the strategies identified below:

- Positioning
- Development of appropriate marketing outreach materials
- Promotional efforts
- Direct sales efforts
- Organizational structure
- Funding for tourism promotion
- Product development potentials
- Local education and hospitality training
- On-going evaluation methods

## **Positioning**

### **Recommended Positioning Strategy**

FATs current positioning is “Virginia’s Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Stafford.” This is the wording found on the front of the Visitor Guide and other materials.

Although a large number of people are aware of the historic significance of the Fredericksburg area, there are many who are not. And, while history is a prime visitation attractor, it is not the only appeal of the area. Research confirms that history is a primary attractor for visitation to the Fredericksburg area. However, the research also documents that it is the combination of charming downtowns (shopping and dining), history, atmosphere and scenery, and fun activities that is important to visitors.

RTM recommends more clearly defining the total appeal visitors find in Fredericksburg area.

Based on research findings, RTM recommends that FAT now refocus its tourism positioning and promote the most compelling benefits of vacationing in the area. Specifically, this includes:

- Scenery and historic atmosphere
- Historic sites and battlefields
- Downtown Fredericksburg shops and restaurants

This is sound positioning for other reasons as well. National research tells us that scenic beauty is always a major factor for choosing a destination. Similarly, history is identified as one of the top 5 reasons for choosing specific tourism destinations. Thus, we can have confidence from both the perspective of national research and scientific research for FAT that this positioning will be successful.

Additionally, this research report confirms that the average stay in the Fredericksburg area is 2.73 nights. Approximately 67% of the parties who overnight are adults traveling without children and approximately 33% do have children. Therefore, we need a positioning statement that appeals primarily to adults traveling without children, but also addresses vacationing families.

Based on the research conducted in this study the positioning statement Randall Travel Marketing recommends for increasing tourism in the Fredericksburg area is:

**Tempered by Revolution  
Torn by Civil War**

**300 years of American history and fun**

***In the Fredericksburg region you'll experience the battlefields of Civil War,  
the boyhood home of George Washington, historic downtowns  
and three centuries of American legends***

This statement positions the area clearly as a vacation destination. It combines the top reasons for travel to the region (Civil War history, atmosphere, vacation) and the specific top attractions in the region (downtown Fredericksburg shops and restaurants and Civil War Battlefields). It also forms a bridge to identified unmet needs (more focus on George Washington). It works for adults traveling without children and for families. It is believable and motivational.

Most importantly it communicates there is fun and entertaining experiences to be found. It is not enough for people to simply hear the names Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford. We must sell the fact that this is a *historic atmosphere with entertaining things to see and do*.

This positioning statement would be used in all promotional efforts. This would be used on the front of the primary marketing brochure, print ads, web site and other marketing outreach materials.

## **Marketing and Outreach**

### **1. Primary positioning focus for all marketing and promotional materials**

FAT needs to capitalize effectively upon its primary “attractors” including those things that are most appreciated by visitors, and use these to compel visitation, extend visitor stays and increase frequency of repeat visits. Promotional efforts for the area need to be refocused on these primary “attractors.” Many destinations make the mistake of trying to promote all attractions and amenities equally. Otherwise, they are perceived to be treating each entity unfairly. However, allowing this “political correctness” to set the policy for promotion often costs the destination revenues. By giving the potential tourist clear, succinct and compelling reasons to choose this destination over another, one wins the visitor and the resulting expenditures.

In this study, the core attractors that appeal to visitors have been identified for FAT. These attractors will most likely lead the visitor to choose the FAT area as a destination and begin serious consideration of a trip. An example of this would be highlighting the “must sees” in all tourism promotional literature and advertising. This gives potential tourists a quick glance at the most compelling reasons to visit this area.

Remember that the tourist does not know where local city and county boundaries are located. Some people will speak of attractions in Stafford and Spotsylvania as being in Fredericksburg. While visiting “Fredericksburg” they will visit many places, perhaps in other cities and communities as well as other counties. Erase the lines and focus on gaining maximum economic impact for the area by promoting those things that the research has identified as having the greatest tourist appeal. This will require a level of sophistication from the three jurisdictions to understand that even though they are promoting “Fredericksburg” they are actually attracting people to spend the night and spend money in each of the three jurisdictions.

Additionally, FAT needs to develop suggested itineraries around its tourism products to inform the potential visitor that there is more here than just a quick day trip or one night stay.

**2. Refocused marketing materials and efforts**

The marketing materials (brochures, ads, press releases, etc.) for FAT need to be redesigned and refocused based on research findings and the recommended positioning statement. The research identifies the message that the traveling public wants to hear. A consistent image must be maintained in all of the marketing materials so that they all work together.

**3. Design primary brochures to include a “lure” piece (or rack card) and a fulfillment piece (or visitors guide)**

When asked, “What sources of information most influenced your travel decision?” the number three response in this study was “Fredericksburg area brochure.” This is consistent with information RTM has documented in other destinations. Thus, printed brochures are critical to the marketing effort for FAT.

RTM recommends that two brochures be developed: a lure piece (or rack brochure) and a fulfillment piece (or visitors guide). This allows FAT to print the maximum number of overall pieces at the greatest cost efficiency and to use these tools to their best value.

The lure piece/rack brochure would be distributed in visitor contact points far and wide as budget allows. Potential visitors find this brochure in state welcome centers and distribution points outside the immediate area. The lure piece/rack brochure is simply an abbreviated version of the more comprehensive visitors guide.

RTM recommends new, correctly positioned and compelling brochures be developed. It is critical that both brochures contain the following:

- **“Hook” on the top, front one-third page of brochure.** This is the hook that will generate interest. This must be based on the positioning statement adopted by FAT.
- **Emotional connection.** The next step for this brochure is to create an emotional connection that places the reader in the experience of visiting Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania. This emotional connection appeals to the senses and speaks of the sights, sounds, relaxing and fun experiences one can enjoy in the area.
- **“Must Sees.”** The next critical factor is to tell the potential visitor specifically the unique attractions and experiences they will find. This tells the visitor why they should stay here as opposed to other areas.
- **Suggested itineraries.** It is critical to help the visitor facilitate their trip. Suggested itineraries do just that. It helps the visitor plan their time most effectively and understand how to best enjoy the area.

**3. (Cont'd)**

- **Listing of attractions.** Beyond the “must sees,” visitors need to know all the attractions they may enjoy. This is an actual listing that provides the detail visitors need in order to plan a trip. It would inform the visitor about driving directions, hours of operation, costs and contact information.
- **Listing of hotels and amenities.** Next in the trip facilitation process is helping the visitor choose overnight lodging. This should be presented in a full informational format, indicating services and amenities for each property. Tourists report to us they prefer to have photos of each lodging property (if possible) in addition to the listing of amenities.
- **Listing of unique restaurants and shopping.** One of the first decisions a visitor makes after choosing the destination and lodging is restaurants and shopping. The FAT organization needs to identify and promote those unique dining and shopping experiences for visitors. Again, be sure not to fall into the trap of listing every restaurant and shopping attraction equally. Feature only those offering unique experiences. Those who are disturbed that FAT is not printing a comprehensive listing need to be reminded that a full listing of restaurants, shopping opportunities, etc. should be available in lodging rooms throughout the area. The goal here is to compel visitation.
- **Events.** One wants to inform the visitor about annual events and seasonal product offerings that compel visitation. Again, this helps facilitate the visit.
- **Idiot-proof map.** A comprehensive, very clear map is critical to all visitors. Great care should be used in developing this map, and it should be tested on visitors to evaluate usefulness.
- **Contact for more information.** Tell the visitor exactly who to contact for more trip planning information. Ideally this would include a toll free phone number, fax, Email address and street address as well as web site. Put the toll free number and web site address in big bold numbers at the bottom of each brochure page.
- **Distribution plan.** After developing the brochure it will be necessary to establish a distribution plan. Various distribution agencies will need to be contacted and services contracted.



**4. Padded maps with information on reverse side**

Once the primary brochures have been redesigned, RTM recommends designing a one or two color inexpensive map that can be printed in pads and distributed to hotels, attractions, visitor centers and visitor contact points. Make sure the map design resembles the look of the other marketing materials and meets the following criteria: one or two-color map with information on “must-sees,” attractions and unique dining/shopping listed on the reverse side. The copy for the information would match the detail information found in the visitor guide. However, since it is given to those already in the area, it can be printed with less expense.

This is an excellent “extend the stay” tool as well. When visitors are overnighing in the area – whether for business or pleasure – they will use this map to identify reasons for them to perhaps stay one day longer or plan a return visit. Ads can be sold to defray the cost of the map if necessary.

**5. Inquiry and fulfillment procedures:**

- FAT has an established “fulfillment procedures” process. RTM recommends an annual review of the performance of inquiry-to-fulfillment based on this established process.
- RTM recommends documenting for inquiries:
  - Point of origin
  - Address, Telephone & Email address
  - When planning to visit
  - Primary interest
    - Business
    - Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)
    - Vacation/leisure/getaway
    - Other

**6. Advertisement design**

Similar to the primary brochures above, the ads designed to attract visitors to the FAT area need to reflect the positioning statement and to offer the most compelling reasons to visit the area.

- Ads need to be simple, clean and highlight the attractors.
- RTM reviewed the previous ads for FAT and recommends that they be improved with a design that mirrors the look and imagery of the marketing materials we've recommended earlier in this document. It is critical that all materials have a consistent look to create the highest level of awareness on FAT's relatively small marketing budget.

**7. Advertising planning and placement**

The visitor research should be the foundation of all future advertising decisions.

- Plan annual advertising investments based on research, objectives, and previous year evaluations and conversion rates.
- As seen in this research, the most effective placement for advertising media for FAT includes:
  - *AAA Tour Book*
  - *Internet – Virginia Tourism web site*
  - *FAT brochures*
  - *Virginia State Travel Guide*
  - *Guide To Virginia's Civil War*
  - *Internet – Fredericksburg web site*
  - *Reader's Digest*
  - *Family Circle*
  - *Newspaper inserts*
  - *Welcome Centers (state)*

Also, in addition to the advertising placements noted above, RTM recommends having billboards along I-95 with the message "Civil War Battlefields and historic Fredericksburg." This will work to notify travelers along this busy interstate that a haven of history lies just beyond, and will perhaps encourage those who have never been to the area to stop in and see what the area looks like. Once they see the lovely historic nature of the area, they will return.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **8. Public relations efforts**

Considering FAT's relatively small marketing budget, public relations becomes a critical marketing tool. It provides outstanding "bang for the buck" and will allow FAT to reach out to many niche markets and new geographic market areas at the least cost.

- RTM recommends that FAT prepare an Annual PR Plan based on specific objectives, strategies and tactics.
- RTM recommends consistent, year-round public relations efforts aimed at gaining media coverage in target market areas of the Northeast (New Jersey and New York), Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and California.
- Further, RTM recommends FAT perform an annual "return on investment" study for public relations efforts. This annual study needs to include:
  - Copies of press kit, news releases and mailing list for that calendar year.
  - A full listing of mailings to media contacts.
  - Number of media contacts made during the year (segmented by phone, mail, FAM tour, visit)
  - Number of placements in inches of stories that ran outside of the FAT area – and their dollar value if it were advertising placement.
  - Number of placements in inches of stories that ran in the FAT area.
  - Number of calls and inquiries received from each story (at least an approximation).

The annual review will support FAT in understanding which public relations activities provide sufficient results. Those results can be incorporated into planning the following year's public relations efforts.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **9. Marketing partnerships with Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania attractions and amenities and private enterprise**

Our overall strategic direction for growing tourism in the FAT area includes aggressive promotion of existing tourism products to targeted geographic and niche target markets, as well as development of new products and services. Therefore, it is important that FAT have dynamic and successful marketing partnerships with and among the attractions and amenities in the area.

- Hold an annual “marketing retreat” for idea sharing and benchmarking with other tourism organizations in the FAT region.
- Be a leader in distributing research findings and creative strategies to empower progress for constituents.
- Be a leader in promoting “packaging” co-op opportunities as well as co-op advertising and public relations programs for these groups.

### **10. Establish a strong technology strategy for outreach to niche and geographic markets**

Nationally, travel data research reflects dramatic growth in Internet use by those seeking information on travel destinations. Similarly, research conducted by the State of Virginia confirms this trend. In this study, we learned that the State tourism web site is the number two source of visitor information. One can be certain that potential travelers to the Fredericksburg area will become increasingly reliant on the Internet for travel planning. Thus, having an excellent web site and technology use strategy is critical for FAT.

One sees that this represents an opportunity for FAT to establish an excellent web site and create the compelling images and copy that will best position and sell potential visitors. The key Internet factors are:

- Internet site must be user friendly, fast and informative.
- It also needs to be interactive in order to engage and retain visitors to the site.
- Site needs to accommodate interest by niche and market segments.
- Imagery and key messages for the site need to be consistent with all other advertising/PR materials.
- Fax promotion materials available for fax on demand.
- Keep that toll free number prominently displayed throughout the site.
- Establish e-mail databases and begin e marketing with newsletters and package promotions to those who have inquired previously.
- Improve current data management processes for all inquiry databases to provide improved demographic data for future marketing decision making.
- Improve current reader service label processes to allow for better efficiency in processing fulfillment packages and long-term database storage and analysis.

**11. Trade shows**

Trade shows are a critical component in outreach efforts for FAT. It allows the organization the opportunity to present its message to large numbers of group, meeting, and leisure trip planners. RTM recommends FAT employ the following principals for attendance to trade shows

- Be prepared with redesigned group tour planner that includes an area map, photography and descriptions of “must-sees” and itineraries that are described and outlined on the map.
- Match tradeshow attendance to research-identified target markets.
- Increase leisure consumer show attendance in research-identified target geographic and market niche areas.
- Booth display should be visually exciting and utilize the same imagery recommended in this report for brochures, ads, etc.
- Solicit support of local tourism “partners” for expenses, promotions, give-aways etc.
- Encourage participation with local tourism “partners”.
- After attendance to the trade show, an evaluation should be conducted (on an annual basis) to determine which shows generated sufficient return on investment and which did not. The next year’s plan of trade show attendance should be based on this analysis.

## **Promotional Efforts**

### **12. Gateways, wayfinding and visitor signage**

As documented in the reconnaissance section of this report, Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania gateways and signage need review. It is important for visitors to know when they have arrived in a destination, that they are welcomed, and where to go to find trip planning information.

We encourage FAT to study the Reconnaissance Report found in Section 4 of this study and analyze its gateways to ensure that appropriate gateway signage is in place. The most critical aspects of a gateway according to visitors includes:

1. Prominent location upon entering the community.
2. Attractive and architecturally pleasing.
3. Directions to visitor information.
4. Landscaping.
5. Lighting (important at night).
6. Includes positioning (why should I stop here?)

Interestingly, many gateways RTM encounters contain information about the various civic clubs and community groups. Few gateways provide directions to visitor information and this is unfortunate...a missed opportunity!

**13. New, dynamic FAT visitor center**

During the course of this project we shopped the two regional visitor centers (Spotsylvania and downtown Fredericksburg) on several different occasions. The Spotsylvania Visitor Center location is more convenient for arriving visitors. The Fredericksburg Visitor Center is a good resource for visitors already in the downtown area. The staff at both centers does an admirable job in visitor information service. More training could be provided at both locations for enhanced conversion.

RTM recommends that a larger, more comprehensive visitor center be developed either by expanding the current Spotsylvania County Visitor Center location or developing a new location convenient to I-95. The new center would feature:

- Excellent wayfinding signage to lure visitors into the center.
- A new, dynamic orientation film that provides an overview of the region and reasons for spending 4-5 days to experience the area.
- Print materials that provide itineraries and suggestions for spending 4-5 days.
- A well-trained staff that understands that conversion is the mission of this center.
- Convenient restrooms, adequate parking, and other necessary amenities.

Further, RTM recommends repeated “mystery shopping” of these centers to monitor success and results.

The existing downtown visitor center should remain as a continuing source of information for those visitors in the downtown Fredericksburg area.

**14. In-room extend-the-stay promotion**

An existing overnight market for FAT is the I-95 transient traveler. RTM recommends a strategy of enticing these travelers to stay longer or come back another time to experience the Fredericksburg area as a tourist. Perhaps this will also encourage them to return and bring along family for the next trip.

- This strategy would be implemented by having either tent cards or informational pieces in each FAT area lodging room which identifies the “must sees” and other attractions and activities to be enjoyed in the three jurisdictions.

**15. Visiting friends & relatives (VFR), reunions, weddings, and funerals promotion**

Residents of the three jurisdictions have friends and relatives who visit for a variety of reasons. The smart DMO will provide trip planning information and resources to assist these travelers, with the goal of hopefully increasing the number of overnight stays. This is another built-in market FAT can capitalize upon. This promotion would be accomplished with:

- Perhaps having an annual pull-out special section in the local newspaper which talks about what tourists enjoy about visiting the region, along with tips for planning a reunion, where to find resources (flowers, cards, gifts, etc.) for weddings and when in the area for funerals. Further, this section would contain the “must sees” and other attractions and amenities in the area that visitors will want to enjoy during their stay.
- A small, inexpensively printed brochure exclusively for planning a family reunion. Have these available at all hotels, restaurants, the visitor centers and any other visitor points. Residents will appreciate the assistance, and the area will gain overnight stays.
- Small, inexpensively printed brochure distributed to churches, bridal shops, and funeral homes. These brochures would include a listing of all needed services and amenities for these occasions – everything from drug stores to flower and gift shops – as well as a restaurant and hotel listing, and the “must sees” and other attractions to visit while in the area.

**16. Seasonal reasons to visit the Fredericksburg area promotion**

FAT has activities and events for each season of the year. The existing visitor centers do a good job of highlighting current events so that visitors can easily see what things might be enjoyed. RTM recommends that the FAT organization prepare a detailed calendar of seasonal events and activities which can be enjoyed by visitors and distribute this to all lodging properties, restaurants, and other visitor points. This would also make very good information for front desk staff at the local lodging properties. According to research conducted for this study, festivals have strong appeal as a reason to visit the area. However, events should only be marketed by FAT if they have the opportunity to increase lodging occupancy and economic impact for the city. Every festival or event should be followed up with a fax survey to local lodging to determine the actual impact on room sales. This will provide guidance for future marketing efforts for events and festivals.



## **Marketing Strategies**

### **17. Museum pass program**

RTM reviewed the administration and results of the “Pick Four” and Hospitality Pass promotional program. Although there is great interest in this program from the participating museums, RTM was discouraged to find that NONE of the participating museums and attractions attempted to sell us a pass while we were mystery shopping their individual attraction. Thus, this has become a program that FAT promotes, but is not promoted by the participating members. The results have been disappointing, and RTM believes it is because the participating members have not done their part in the promotional effort.

Also, the members in this program must realize that this program is exclusive for them and does nothing for the non-participating attractions and amenities. As such, it borders on being unfair for FAT to provide this intense promotion for only a limited number of attractions. Also, one must look at the research results and realize that the attractions identified in this promotion are not necessarily those that provide the greatest appeal to the visitor.

RTM recommends a review of the program with the participating members. Further we recommend that this program continue for one more year – and only if the participating members are committed to doing their part to help encourage wide ticket sales. FAT should promote the program heavily (at the visitor centers) for the one year test period if the commitment is accepted by the participating members. If the results of ticket purchases remain less than desirable after the one year test period, it is recommended that the program be either abandoned or reorganized to include a different arrangement of museums that cover the three jurisdictions. Participation in the program should be based on willingness to co-promote and appeal of the attractions according to research results.

### **18. Packages**

FAT needs to drive the development of a variety of promotional packages. RTM recommends that the research conducted for this study, as well as input from constituents be the factors upon which packages are formed and tested.

RTM learned during the course of this study that it may be challenging to get local lodging to “buy in” on package promotions. Local lodging properties don’t have the need for weekend occupancy due to heavy interstate related overnight visitation and visitation to Fredericksburg. But, packages would be a big benefit for the attractions in the region. Thus, RTM recommends that FAT be the leader in helping to coach its constituents on the type of packages that might work and how best to develop same. Packages can also increase longer stays as opposed to one night stopovers. Also, RTM recommends that this be a “pay as you play” promotional effort, and although the concept should be developed by FAT in order to ensure consistent imagery, the production art and printing/distribution of the message should be borne by the participants.

## **Direct Sales Efforts To Niche Markets**

### **18. Group tour and motorcoach sales effort strategy**

The excellent I-95 geographic location of the Fredericksburg area between Washington and Richmond provides advantages for group tour promotion. This is a very lucrative market for the FAT to pursue. RTM recommends that FAT continue to attend the appropriate trade shows, and make direct sales calls to group tour operators. The goal is to either sell a group tour operator on bringing a group to the area, or to capture them as an overnight on a trip to another location.

FAT has a good group tour promotion effort in place and should continue to work this market with the following objectives in mind: (NOTE: Please see recommendations under the “Marketing Materials Evaluation” section in this report.)

- Develop appropriate solicitation materials including a pocket folder with suggested itineraries and reasons to choose to overnight in the FAT region as an exclusive trip or while in route to another location. These materials should match the imagery of all other FAT promotional pieces.
- Identifying a list of most likely tour operators and trade shows.
- Having a booth for trade shows that is dynamic, matches the image of the revised primary marketing materials and works to capture the attention of trade show participants. You must stand out and be memorable so make that booth dramatic!
- Contacting your area tourism marketing partners, attractions, etc. to obtain give-aways and promotional items.
- Follow-up with all trade show leads for maximum results.
- Make personal sales call missions at least every six months to targeted group tour operators in the FAT target market areas.
- Follow up all group tours with an evaluation form that allows you to determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of FAT as a group destination. By analyzing these results FAT can continuously improve its group tour products.

**19. Small meeting recruitment promotion**

FAT must continue to work with local lodging properties to identify potential for the small meeting market. RTM recommends that FAT take a leadership role in partnering with these lodging properties to prepare effective marketing materials for mailings and other contacts made for small meetings. FAT needs to also provide information that may be mailed out to attendees prior to attending a meeting in FAT area.

The purpose of these mailings is to extend the stay and encourage maximum attendance. Specifically this promotion strategy entails:

- Preparing possible materials that would be included in any mailing to small meeting planners.
- Contacting local lodging properties to offer partnership and to determine needs. Understand these lodging properties may need to be coached to understand the value of this promotion for their own interests. Work with them to understand the dynamics of small meetings and the resources (meeting space, transportation, etc.) options that are available.
- Identifying possible small meeting decision makers and supporting lodging properties in contacting these
- Following up with lodging properties to determine the success of promotional efforts and what's needed for continuous improvement of the promotional effort.

**20. Sports Groups**

With its excellent I-95 geographic location between two major markets (Washington and Richmond), the Fredericksburg region has significant potential as a sports/athletics market. Some adequate sports/athletic facilities already exist. The jurisdictions are encouraged to look to developing even better facilities. RTM believes developing and enhancing these facilities, and recruiting league sports and tournaments would bring excellent return-on-investment for Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties. It would bring in new potential markets and be a good complement to the existing product base.

- Develop an inventory of all existing facilities.
- Develop a wish list of new facilities to be developed.
- Match marketing efforts to existing facilities for the short term.
- Develop database of potential market contacts for new potential facilities.

**21. Golf Marketing**

Golf is a primary tourism activity for 1 out of 5 traveling Americans. With 20% of the total traveling public participating in golf, it is advisable for FAT to promote existing public golf facilities and to continue to develop new golf attractions for the traveling public. Particularly for Stafford County, this strategy is advisable.

- Develop an inventory of all existing public golf facilities.
- Develop an inventory of all planned golf developments.
- Match marketing efforts to existing facilities for the short term.
- Develop database of potential market priorities for new golf developments as they are scheduled to come on line.

**22. Conventions and large meetings**

The FAT area is not currently a destination for conventions and large meetings. There are no facilities for housing these meetings in the area. The three jurisdictions need to understand that significant economic impact is generated by the addition of this type of facility.

Current development is planned at Central Park - Celebrate Virginia that will add these facilities to the existing market mix for the Fredericksburg area. Although somewhat controversial (to the local residents) in design and scope, this development is applauded by RTM as providing the critical elements that will lure a major new market segment into the region. Also, the location of the Central Park – Celebrate Virginia development is good. It's directly along I-95, thus minimizing the traffic congestion. Convention goers who come to this facility will visit any compelling attractions and amenities in the region.

The recommended FAT organization needs to be proactive in identifying potential new convention and large meeting contacts and working with Central Park – Celebrate Virginia to target those conventions that will be a perfect match for the greater tourism products offered in the Fredericksburg region.

- FAT to partner with Central Park – Celebrate Virginia to determine when convention facilities will be on-line. FAT to develop potential convention decision maker targets and work with Central Park to identify and pursue potential business.

**23. Northern Virginia day trip shoppers**

Downtown Fredericksburg merchants report that their best market for sales is the upper income northern Virginia market. When queried, it was learned that a significant number of these visitors are day trippers in town exclusively for shopping in the downtown Fredericksburg area. This is an important market for these retailers and for FAT.

RTM recommends that an additional study be conducted. This would include intercept surveys and written surveys (handed to numerous shoppers at the retail locations and then returned by mail). The purpose of this study is to determine:

- Rank order of geographic markets (zip codes).
- Preferred sources of information regarding shopping in downtown Fredericksburg.
- Visitor expenditures (shopping, dining, attractions, lodging, etc.)
- Satisfaction with current retail product mix.
- Unmet needs and suggestions for new product development (rank order of potential products to be added by downtown merchants).
- Compelling elements for shopping in downtown Fredericksburg.

RTM recommends that this survey be conducted over a one-year period. The results of the study would be used to help shape marketing efforts for the downtown merchants, as well as assist FAT in clearly understanding the potential of this niche market and how to best motivate this market. The retailers and downtown merchants need to also understand how this marketing strategy fits in with the overall marketing strategies for FAT and be willing to support the results of the recommended study.

**24. Civil War enthusiasts**

Clearly, one of the most compelling “attractors” for visiting the three jurisdictions is the interest in Civil War history and heritage. This is a large and enduring market segment for FAT to pursue.

RTM recommends that FAT consider a combination of public relations and advertising outreach to this niche interest market. There are publications that appeal directly to this market. Advertising placement as well as public relations efforts need to be targeted to these publications. Additionally, public relations efforts need to be targeted at newspapers, general interest publications, etc. that will promote the appeal of this area to the Civil War enthusiast.

RTM believes that FAT will find a greater return on advertising investment by marketing the overall appeal of the three jurisdictions as the top priority, and by applying a relatively small (perhaps 5% of total outreach budget) amount to direct niche advertising. RTM does strongly recommend that public relations directly and aggressively address this marketing for FAT.

## **Organizational Structure**

### **25. Advancement of FAT to a free standing tourism authority**

RTM commends the three jurisdictions for their demonstrated willingness to invest cooperatively in the FAT marketing program. This is proof of the critical importance of tourism to these three jurisdictions. Also, it is clear that the results of this cooperative effort have worked. This is documented in the research conducted for this study. Visitors *do* see the “Fredericksburg area” as having appeal. It makes sense to them that these three areas be co-marketed. Also, according to the community and opinion leaders contacted in this study there was virtually unanimous consent that marketing the three jurisdictions as one destination makes produces results greater than either can achieve on their own.

Thus, RTM recommends that the three jurisdictions now establish a stronger, more empowered organization to continue this work and to take tourism to the next level for this region. Our recommendation is that this be a tourism authority, jointly appointed by the three jurisdictions and be comprised of direct stakeholders (hoteliers, attractions, restaurants, and merchants).

RTM recommends that this new organization be accountable for tourism results and return on marketing investments by tracking results and preparing an annual report that documents return on investment for each of the three jurisdictions. Additionally, this new authority needs to serve as comprehensive resource for:

- Researching market needs
- Providing “wish list” of new tourism products
- Partnering with the three jurisdictions for continued tourism infrastructure enhancement
- Providing research and guidance to attractions, lodging, restaurants and other marketing partners
- Promoting and marketing the FAT region

**26. Organizational structure strategy**

The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) is a membership organization of CVBs. The IACVB maintains extensive research that provides communities with excellent resources for determining most effective staffing, promotion, and funding options for tourism development. RTM recommends that as FAT continues to grow, that their practices be continually measured against IACVB's standards for appropriate development.

The most effective tourism boards and governing authorities are those that truly represent the industry, are limited in size and have an Executive Committee that is empowered to make critical decisions when the full Board is unable to meet. RTM generally recommends a manageable board size of approximately 9 members. For the new FAT we recommend a board of thirteen representatives, with 1 lodging appointee from each jurisdiction, 1 attractions/historic site appointee from each jurisdiction, 1 restaurant appointee from each jurisdictions, and one at-large appointee from a tourism related business in each jurisdiction. The final at-large appointee will rotate among the three jurisdictions. Each board member will serve a three year term with terms staggered in each jurisdiction. An Executive Committee will be comprised of four officers selected by the board.

Committees should be chaired by board members and made up of board and non-board members who are actively involved in tourism promotion. Effort should be made to include representation from as many tourism entities as is possible on each committee. Committees should meet only as necessary and should do the actual planning work of the organization. Committees should send recommendations to the Executive Committee or full board for action. The Executive Director coordinates and guides the planning process of these committees to insure realistic goals and plans are put in place.

The committees that should be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Finance and Grant Development
- Product Inventory and Development
- Research and Marketing
- Leadership and Training

The Leadership Committee mentioned above is recommended to target and identify potential future leaders for the tourism organization. This can be accomplished with:

- On-going hospitality / front-line training
- Annual "Rising Star" awards and recognition
- Tourism leadership mentoring program

**27. Staffing for FAT**

The role of the FAT is to be “the voice of tourism” within the community. It is critical that the Executive Director of this proposed organization have demonstrated experience in successful promotion of similar historic and heritage destinations. Also, it is critical that this person have successfully demonstrated business practices such as research and strategic planning and measurement of results. The Director and staff of this new organization need to understand the trends that drive the industry. Additionally the new director must be new to the area and objective so to avoid the appearance of any favoritism toward any one jurisdiction. The staff needs to continue to be aggressive in attaining awareness of the role of tourism in the community with the local industry, business leaders, government leaders, and residents.

In addition to its leadership roles, the FAT staff should be considered the marketing/advertising agency for tourism in the region. They exist to promote and advertise the area to the traveling public to generate maximum economic impact. Similarly, FAT needs to be proactive in educating its industry partners (lodging, attractions, etc.) on current research findings and other data, which will assist in tourism marketing.

RTM recommends that FAT monitor annual budgets, and work plans based on its research findings and the standards of operation recommended by the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB). For instance, IACVB recommends that the salary level for a typical CVB be in the 25-40% range of total occupancy tax collected. To determine when it is time to add new staff, a CVB looks at its tax collections and percentages of expenditures. If it finds that staff costs are in the 25% range of total occupancy tax collected, it can reasonably be determined that there is more workload than the current staff can handle.

Upon adding a staff person, the CVB might see the percentage of total budget increased to the 40% range. Then, as the new staff person becomes productive, the percentage of total budget should begin to decrease.



## **Funding For FAT Tourism Development Office**

### **28. Increasing funding for the proposed FAT organization**

As is the standard in the tourism industry, all tourism tax monies should be used exclusively for promotion of visitation.

The overriding question to be asked regarding ANY tourism tax expenditures is *“Will it bring more targeted overnight and day trip visitors into Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania?”* If a strong, affirmative and reliable answer to this question cannot be provided, it is not a wise expenditure. This should be the guiding principle for all future uses of tourism tax dollars.

As mentioned in the strategic direction, RTM recommends increased funding for the proposed FAT authority. The current combined tourism marketing budget for the three jurisdictions of \$1,463,499 budget is simply inadequate to the task of hiring the caliber of staff required, doing the aggressive promotion required, and strategically growing tourism revenues for the area.

Thus, RTM recommends that each jurisdiction allocate 100% of the occupancy taxes, plus 40% of the meals taxes (until a more accurate percentage of meals taxes can be determined to be driven by visitors) to the funding of this new authority.

These recommended budget amounts and percentages are appropriate and match the standards established by IACVB and other destinations around the country. *Those taxes that are created by visitors should be returned to the promotion of visitation.* When this is done, the jurisdiction can expect overall tourism revenues to grow. When tax dollars generated by tourists are NOT allocated back to tourism promotion RTM typically finds that tourism results steadily diminish. Thus, if the three jurisdictions are committed to growth of the tourism economic impact for their constituents, this allocation must be made.

## Recommended Product Development

The Fredericksburg region has excellent existing attractions and tourism products. Additionally, in this study, we asked tourists what products, services, and attractions they would most like to see added to the existing product mix.

*Clearly this research identified that tourists enjoy vacationing in the Fredericksburg area and want more connection to the history, heritage and atmosphere of the area.*

The top reported desired new tourism products are:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| • Civil War Reenactments                                       | 70.94% |
| • Arts & crafts festivals                                      | 64.53% |
| • George Washington Museum                                     | 63.68% |
| • Multi-entertainment complex with<br>Hotels/shops/attractions | 56.84% |
| • Antique trail  | 54.27% |
| • 1-man shows (Lee, Grant,<br>Washington)                      | 48.72% |

Generally speaking, anything that is rated above a 40% mark is of significant interest. The top rated items identified above are consistent with the overall marketing thrust recommended in this report. Clearly, tourists are coming to the Fredericksburg area for history and to enjoy the historic atmosphere and fun. Similarly, shopping is always a top tourism activity, and this is reflected in the appeal of developing a multi-entertainment complex and an antique trail.

Thus, the findings here are quite consistent with national tourism research that shows the growing interest in “a sense of place” and interest in heritage tourism, as well as the appeal of shopping and entertainment.

In the strategies that follow in this section, RTM recommends specific new products and programs that will speak to these needs and support growth of a stronger tourism market for FAT.

At the same time, it is critical that the region understands that the role of FAT is to *promote* rather than to *build*. It is inappropriate for tourism tax funds to be used for development purposes. However, FAT should play a leadership role in identifying unmet visitor needs and encouraging development of new tourism products which match visitor interests.

**29. Civil War Reenactments**

The Civil War has great appeal – and it seems more so during the Millennium period. This is due to the fact that people are looking forward and at the same time examining their past. Thus, finding the number one new product request to be Civil War reenactments should be no surprise for FAT.

However, organizing and implementing these reenactments can be very time consuming and difficult and has not been a FAT function thus far. If FAT can encourage this type of event in any form, it should be successful. Also, FAT might consider encouraging alternative but similar types of tourism products including:

- *Guided Civil War Tours:* Guided, narrated tours are always successful. It is the “edu-tainment” factor that makes these tours so appealing. Visitors love having a knowledgeable guide escort them to various sites and make the history come alive for them. Certainly, this can be an expensive undertaking. RTM recommends that this be put on the “wish list” of new products and that FAT encourage the development of guided, narrated tours that cover the Civil War and other historic time periods.
- *Audio Cassettes:* Having an audio cassette that captures some of the historic moments and stories of the Civil War would be a successful venture for FAT. This will bring to life the essence of the unique history and heritage in the three jurisdictions. Although an audio cassette tour exists now at the battlefields and can be found in a few gift shops in Fredericksburg, it is not the quality or comprehensive product that we recommend. RTM recommends this be developed by FAT and made available for all visitors, perhaps with rental equipment.

**30. Arts & crafts festivals**

The second highest rated potential new product for visitors was “arts & crafts festivals.” With large feeder markets such as Washington and Richmond, and built-in markets such as those overnighting along I-95 this makes sense. During the course of this study, RTM noted the area already has a number of festivals and events. RTM interprets this strategy to mean that public relations promotion and in-hotel promotion of these existing events would be successful. Let the market know these events are available and they will come.

- FAT to promote existing festivals and events via:
  - “upcoming festivals and events” section on FAT web site.
  - Fax calendar of events weekly to area hotels and lodging.
  - Continuous, year-round public relations effort to promote festivals and events.
  - Posting of “this week’s events” at welcome center(s) and visitor contact points.

**31. George Washington**

The “Father of our Country” has *huge* appeal as an enhanced existing product for the Fredericksburg area. This is also evidenced by the comments RTM gathered from staff at the Ferry Farm (George Washington’s Boyhood Home) site who told us that the things people ask about most are the stories and legends (chopping Cherry Trees and throwing coins across the river) as well as the actual site of his birth, etc. Basically, George Washington is a relatively untapped resource as a tourism product for this region.

Therefore, RTM recommends that FAT and the three jurisdictions support development of a significant museum and/or other interpretive facilities that focuses on the life of George Washington and allows visitors to learn and enjoy more about the life of this great American leader.

**32. Multi-entertainment complex with hotels/shops/attractions**

Although during the course of this study RTM noted numerous controversial comments among local residents about the relatively new Central Park complex and the planned Celebrate Virginia complex, it is clear that the voice of the customer has registered as approving this concept. The existing facility tied for fourth place ranking in appeal of all attractions in the Fredericksburg area. Also, in testing unmet needs, the fourth most demanded product was for a multi-entertainment complex with hotels/shops/attractions. The reason is simple. People enjoy going to a lively area with fun and interesting things to do and see and buy. RTM has tracked the success of similar projects and developments all over the country. One that Fredericksburg would do well to benchmark against is Broadway at the Beach in Myrtle Beach. Although not on prime ocean-front property, this development has become a major draw in its own right because it offers what the customer is looking for.

RTM acknowledges the Central Park development. It does not have the historic *look* one normally finds in and near Fredericksburg – and one can argue as to whether that is a good thing or a bad thing. It would have been nice if the complex could have been developed with an appearance more in keeping with the area. However, when asked if the look of this center was disturbing in any way, most visitors commented that it looked like a typical mall area. It did not seem to bother them that this did not look like Fredericksburg. Since it is not downtown Fredericksburg they seem to make little connection to the need for a historically authentic look. This reflects what we learned in the scientific portion of the study survey findings. Additionally the visitors indicated that they would not like to see this kind of development in the downtown historic area.

During the course of this study RTM found numerous visitors to Fredericksburg who were shopping, dining, etc. at Central Park. When asked about why they were there as opposed to downtown Fredericksburg and other attractions and amenities, we found that open evening hours, convenient parking, and concentrated opportunities were the primary appeal. It must be noted that we observed local historic preservationists spending money at Central Park.

Thus, it is clear that this concept appeals to visitors and locals alike. RTM encourages support of this center and marketing cooperative programs that cross sell this complex with the other attractions and amenities in the area. Also, RTM interprets the research to indicate that if the Celebrate Virginia development continues it will be successful.

**33. Antiques shopping trail and expo**

The research identified an antiques shopping trail as a highly rated potential attraction. RTM recommends that FAT develop a brochure, which clearly indicates where existing antique shops are located, and develop this into a mutually beneficial program for participating retailers. Also, FAT may want to consider development of an Antiques Expo to draw large crowds for a specific number of days to the area. It would also enhance recognition for Fredericksburg area as an antique shopping destination and thus year-round impact for local merchants would result. Shopping is one of the most popular activities enjoyed by visitors and antique shops are among the most sought after shopping amenities.

- Develop an inventory of existing antique shops and develop a map and promotional literature for this trail. Include the trail in primary visitor brochure and other promotional literature.

**34. One-man shows of historic leaders**

The fifth most highly rated potential new product for visitors is one-man shows featuring the lives and times of the great historic leaders of the Fredericksburg area. This includes Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, and George Washington.

Today's tourist values "edu-tainment" highly. They like to *learn* while they are being entertained. This is especially true for families with children. Williamsburg has capitalized on this travel trend.

Also, in many destinations we frequently find tourists complaining about the lack of entertainment (other than restaurants, bars and movies) in the evenings. Families as well as adults traveling without children usually seek entertainment during the evening hours.

Having a series of one-man shows such as those identified by tourists would be an ideal evening entertainment option. It is also relatively easy to provide. Perhaps a partnership could be developed with the dinner theater in Stafford County, or a property in downtown Fredericksburg to provide this new product for year-round appeal.

### **35. Shopping opportunities**

Nationally, shopping is the most popular tourism activity. The information below confirms this:

According to RTM research and as documented by *Travel Industry of America (TIA)*, activities participated in by U.S. resident travelers for 1998 included:

- Shopping (33%)
- Outdoor (17%) (Camping, hiking, biking, etc.)
- Historical Sites/Museums (15%)
- Beaches (11%)
- Cultural Events/Festivals (10%)
- National/State Parks (9%)
- Theme/Amusement Parks (8%)

In this study, we noted that shopping was a top-rated activity tourists pursue while visiting the Fredericksburg area. However, when looking at the actual expenditures for visitors, we noted that expenditures in shopping were low compared to other areas we have studied. Most often, we find shopping to be the largest expenditure. In the FAT study, it was ranked last behind lodging, attractions and other expenditure categories. This indicates that there is potential to significantly increase the shopping and retail revenues generated by tourists. Also, during reconnaissance we noted that although there were plenty of visitors in the downtown Fredericksburg area, few were carrying shopping bags. Also, we found that most shops closed around 5:00pm. We found visitors throughout the region looking for something to do with their time and money in the early evening hours.

RTM recommends that the existing inventory of unique shopping for all three jurisdictions be identified and promoted to visitors. Further, as stated earlier in this report, RTM recommends that a separate study be conducted to determine how shopping can be enhanced for visitors. This will determine if it is the products being offered, the operating hours, or whatever is blocking increased retail expenditures.

- FAT to conduct shopping/retail intercept and handout survey study to determine most effective shopping enhancement measures.

**36. Other potential products**

Although not specifically identified and confirmed in research as having high potential, RTM recommends investigation of the following potential tourism products in addition to those identified above. Our rationale for recommending these includes noteworthy attributes documented during our reconnaissance, and likelihood of success based on similar products promoted in other communities similar to the Fredericksburg area.

- **Loop Tour For Motoring:** A riding tour of scenic areas, attractions and historic sites through the three jurisdictions. This is lovely country and would be good for auto touring if visitors knew where to find the best routes.
- **Downtown Fredericksburg Inn:** Based on our experience, this would be a very successful concept. RTM encourages FAT and City of Fredericksburg Economic Development to seriously look to recruiting a downtown Inn. If such an Inn could be developed and also have small meeting/conference facilities it would be successful.
- **America's First Single Working Mom – Mary Washington:** RTM recommends doing more of a story based on the fact that today we have so many single working mothers, and Fredericksburg is home to Mary Washington – a single, working Mom who changed the world by raising her son George to be a leader. This would have great public relations potential.
- **Archeological sites:** During the course of this study we learned that there were numerous significant archeological sites located in this region. We encourage FAT to capture the data, facts, and stories of these sites for future product development. FAT needs to remember that the appeal of Native American sites and other archeological aspects grows continuously. One day, these sites may be a tourism priority. Additionally, it is only appropriate and responsible that FAT would do what is necessary to preserve the heritage of these sites.
- **Unique dining options in Stafford and Spotsylvania:** During the course of this study RTM encountered complaints that the vast majority of unique dining options are located in downtown Fredericksburg with very limited options in Stafford and Spotsylvania. RTM recommends that this information be passed along to potential developers who may have interest in developing more dining options for the two counties.

## **Local Education and Hospitality Training**

### **37. Recommended hospitality training**

RTM recommends enhancing hospitality training in the three jurisdictions to support hospitality workers with training in understanding and communicating the unique positioning for tourism in FAT.

Hospitality training is a challenge for the tourism industry. The “front line” at hotels, restaurants and attractions tends to have a high turnover. Finding and recruiting a sufficient number of employees is often a problem. Additionally, managers of these front lines may or may not have in-depth knowledge of best practices in tourism hospitality training. Thus, the industry has trouble in motivating what may be an already overworked and fluctuating work staff.

Thus, RTM recommends FAT provide the following support to the local tourism industry:

- Short (30 minute) on-site workshops for any local hotel, restaurant or attraction that requests hospitality training.
- Seasonal half-day or daylong workshops to which the entire base of local industries are invited.
- A package of training materials that can be utilized by local area managers to provide on-going staff training.
- Small laminated cards “The Must Sees of the Fredericksburg area” which identify the top things to see and do in the area. To increase the use and remembrance of these cards by local hospitality industry workers, we further suggest that a representative of FAT periodically walk up to front line employees and ask “What do you say when asked “What is there to see and do around here?” Any respondent who can name all the things highlighted on the laminated card from memory receives \$25 on the spot. Be sure to also take their photo and send a news release and photo to the local newspaper for coverage of the ambassadors of tourism.
- Periodic faxes sent to local industry highlighting the seasonal benefits of visiting the Fredericksburg area. In addition to the standard “must sees” include seasonal information and events such as festivals may be found.



**38. Recommended tourism education for local population**

RTM also recommends an annual educational effort designed to inform the local public regarding what tourists find most appealing about visiting in the Fredericksburg area. It is often hard to appreciate one's own area due to familiarity. When asked, we often find that local people are likely to tell us "There's not really much to do around here." Because they see it everyday, they may not appreciate the local tourism options as much as a visitor. By reminding local residents what tourists tell researchers they like about the area, it helps them to keep the perspective and to understand that the area is truly desirable as a vacation destination.

RTM recommends an annual pullout special section in the newspaper that identifies the top things most appreciated by visitors to FAT. Residents can then read this and hopefully become better informed as to the importance of tourism to the area, as well as being able to file this away for future reference.

FAT may benefit from an event such as Macon, Georgia's annual "Be A Tourist In Your Own Hometown" event that takes place on two consecutive evenings. The event is publicized locally and local residents are invited to visit participating area sites and attractions free of charge on the two evenings. By increasing local awareness of the sites and attractions the CVB has seen an increased number of tourism "ambassadors" who are better informed about what their town has to offer. The participating sites have realized increased year-round visitation as result of this promotion.

Additionally, it is good for local residents of the three jurisdictions to see what economic impact and results are created by marketing tourism in the region. The economic impact and return on investment measures need to be reported to the public consistently to build consensus that tourism works for the Fredericksburg area.

## **On-going Evaluation Methods**

RTM recommends continued evaluation, research and measurement of tourism success, unmet needs and marketing efforts for FAT. The specific components of this future study include the items listed below.

### **39. Visitor satisfaction checks**

It is important to continually monitor the level of satisfaction that visitors are experiencing while visiting the area. Sudden drops in the satisfaction rating could have a sudden and long-term effect on occupancy and overall visitor spending. Implement visitor satisfaction checks on a random sampling of visitors to attractions and visitor amenities. This is best implemented by a combination of telephone interviews with managers of local lodging properties, attractions and amenities, as well as conducting on-site random guest interviews. These could be conducted by staff at FAT or by outsource service.

- FAT staff to implement periodic visitor satisfaction intercepts interviews and interviews with management of local lodging and amenities.

### **40. Conduct visitor profile and conversion research every three years**

Changes in visitor profile and conversion need to be reviewed periodically. Therefore, RTM recommends repeating the visitor profile and conversion study every three years. It is not likely to change significantly any more frequently than the three-year period. Additionally, every five/six years research should reveal the strengths, weaknesses and unmet needs.

- FAT to plan and implement visitor profile and conversion research as outlined above.

### **41. Annual evaluation of inquiry point of origin**

Annually, RTM recommends evaluating the point of origin (where inquirers live) of inquirers who respond to FAT tourism advertising. This reaffirms for FAT that it is targeting its advertising outreach placement to the most appropriate markets. This can be accomplished by maintaining a comprehensive database of all inquiries received throughout the year.

- Maintain comprehensive database of inquirers. Annually evaluate point of origin and other data collected from these inquirers.

**42. Web site research form analysis**

RTM recommends FAT add to the questionnaire on its web site that allows the organization to continuously monitor the following:

- Point of origin for inquirers.
- Primary visitor interest.
- Most likely travel party size.
- When planning to visit FAT area.
- Analyze the information frequently to continuously confirm other research results.

**43. Annual documentation and analysis of current status**

RTM recommends that the current status section of this report be repeated annually and monitored for changes. FAT staff can implement this. The important things to measure include:

- Increases/decreases in occupancy tax collections and tourism revenues.
- Number of inquiries generated by outreach efforts.
- Changes in tourism product infrastructure (number of lodging properties and room counts, new attractions, etc.)
- Advertising, promotion and marketing budget for FAT compared to standards established by industry organizations such as International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB).

**44. Inquiry Database “Data mining”**

FAT is now receiving so many inquiries that it will have to refine its methods of database development and storage to insure that all inquiry data is easily accessed and reported in the future. Enhancements to current database methods include:

- All reader response inquiries received electronically and stored as an accessible electronic database.
- All bulk brochure requests retained and stored in a separate database.
- All telephone inquiries that do not require fulfillment should be tracked as such and included in the database system.
- All databases should be designed to be integrated for year end reporting of total inquiry information from all sources.